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ABSTRACT

The developmental strategies adopted by Latin American and Caribbean societies need to acknowledge the key role that education plays and address the challenge of changing production patterns on equitable terms. This document is closely related with the final report of the third session of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. After an introduction, chapter 1 contains a review of the 1980s and stresses the fact that education systems have succeeded in maintaining their quantitative achievements at a high cost in terms of quality and equity. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 review the educational situation in relation to three main objectives: (1) 8 to 10 years' minimum schooling for all children of school age; (2) eradication of illiteracy and expansion of educational facilities for adults; and (3) improving the quality and efficiency of educational systems. The final chapter looks at the challenge that education systems of the Latin American and Caribbean region will have to meet in their future development and suggests three strategies for educational development. (CK)

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**Fourth Session of the
Intergovernmental Regional Committee
for the Major Project
in the Field of Education
in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Quito, Ecuador, 22-25 April 1991

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***Major Project
in the Field of
Education
in Latin America
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***Progress,
limitations,
obstacles and
challenges***

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

FOURTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL REGIONAL COMMITTEE
FOR THE MAJOR PROJECT IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
(PROMEDLAC IV)

Quito, Ecuador, 22-25 April 1991

MAJOR PROJECT IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

PROGRESS, LIMITATIONS, OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

WORKING DOCUMENT

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INTRODUCTION

1. PROMEDLAC IV is taking place at a historic moment of special importance for the future of educational development in the region. It is generally acknowledged that education will play a key role in the development strategies adopted by Latin American and Caribbean societies in order to take up the challenge of changing the patterns of production on equitable terms. Generally speaking, this entails acknowledgement of the fact that profound changes to traditional forms of educational action will be required in order to meet the demands of a new model of development based on the attainment of high levels of international competitiveness and social equity in a context of democratic, pluralistic and participatory institutions.

2. This document ties in closely with the PROMEDLAC III working document and final report. For that reason, elements in those documents which are still valid have been omitted and special attention has been paid to the documents approved by the World Conference on Education for All, held in Thailand in March 1990.

3. The document falls into five chapters. Chapter I contains a review of the decade just ended and stresses the fact that education systems have succeeded in maintaining their quantitative achievements at a high cost in terms of quality and equity. Now that the decade is over, it must be stressed that the possibilities of traditional forms of educational development have been exhausted and that new modalities of action need to be worked out that are consistent with the economic, political and cultural requirements of new development strategies.

4. In Chapters II, III and IV, the educational situation is reviewed in relation to the three main objectives of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the light of basic learning needs identified at the World Conference on Education for All. Those chapters give an account of progress, limitations, obstacles and issues arising from recent experience acquired by the countries concerned in the not too distant past. They also identify points where alternatives must be found in order to raise the level of efficiency of education systems and enlist the help of new social actors traditionally excluded from the world of education.

5. Chapter V looks at the challenge that education systems of the region will have to meet in their future development and the main strategies for tackling it appropriately. That challenge involves:

linking educational action to strategies aimed at changing patterns of production according to equitable criteria by reaching national consensus in the field of education, and

attaining a higher degree of vigour through three main strategies:

- (i) renewal of teaching processes through the professionalization of teachers as a body, flexibility and relevance of curricula, and encouragement of innovation in the priority areas of any policy to improve the quality of education;
- (ii) strengthening of educational administration and management through the use of effective arrangements to enlist the participation of all those involved in the education process, new incentives to give people responsibility for results, selectivity of operations aimed at target populations, and intersectorality in modalities of action;

(iii) optimum use of the possibilities afforded by international co-operation.

6. The purpose of this working document is to facilitate discussion during the proceedings of PROMEDLAC IV. Additional information on the situation of education in the region and on co-operation activities may be found in other documents prepared by UNESCO.¹

1. Educational Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean 1980-1989, Santiago, Chile, 1990, OREALC.
UNESCO's Co-operation within the Framework of the Major Project for the Latin America and the Caribbean Region, PROMEDLAC IV.

CHAPTER I: A NEW STAGE IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

7. The decade 1980-1990 culminated in a series of regional and international events calling for a debate encompassing both the two-year period since PROMEDLAC III and the sectoral analysis of education. In order to gain proper understanding of educational phenomena and to design appropriate strategies, it is today more indispensable than ever before to have a broad overall vision of educational problems.

8. In that decade, educational development coexisted with

regression on the economic and social fronts in the vast majority of the countries of the region. This may best be gauged by setting the achievements made in previous decades and also in the 1980s against those of other countries, especially the industrialized countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and various South-East Asian countries.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has accordingly described that decade as a 'lost decade' and a time of 'painful lessons'.

9. Between 1980 and 1990, education was affected by the economic crisis, mainly through cuts in public expenditure and the deterioration in the quality of life of the people at large. In education, the average reduction in public expenditure was estimated at 25 per cent, although higher percentages were recorded in some countries. The quality of life of middle- and low-income groups in particular, has deteriorated with a sharp decline in their consumption capacity and in their possibilities of joining the labour market.

10. Owing to the reduction in public spending on education and the declining ability of households to bear the costs of education, efforts have concentrated on maintaining the coverage of the system, while sacrificing the quality of the education provided. Although there are major differences from one country to another, an assessment of the decade reveals that it was possible to maintain and in some cases even extend coverage at the cost of a significant deterioration in the working and employment conditions of teaching staff and in the facilities and resources allocated to education, including the school infrastructure.

11. The most eloquent indicator of this deterioration is repetition, which concerns approximately 20 per cent of pupils in primary schools, more particularly in the early grades, and this percentage usually applies to children from low-income families in rural and urban fringe areas.

12. Fundamentally, the deterioration in the working and employment conditions of teaching staff has been the result of the fall in pay, the deterioration in the professional status of their work and the huge difficulties encountered in implementing further training and educational support programmes. Some studies carried out in the countries of the region show that staff are disillusioned and frustrated, while teachers' organizations concentrate their action on wrangles over salary claims and suspend teaching activities, thus reducing the number of days that pupils attend class. On several occasions, in response to initiatives by an authority that did not offer adequate employment or working conditions, teachers have acted to oppose change or educational renewal.

13. The deterioration in the tools of the teaching trade, in both quantity and quality, concerns the availability of materials for both teachers and pupils. Basic materials such as exercise books, textbooks, pencils for pupils and teachers' guides are in short supply. In an education system based primarily on the availability of resources rather than on the suitability of teachers, these shortages seriously curtail the learning opportunities open to pupils. But this deterioration is also apparent in the difficulties encountered in acquiring new equipment and educational apparatus for science teaching and for the introduction of new items directly related to scientific and technological progress such as computers, libraries, laboratories, radios and video systems.

14. The deterioration of the infrastructure of educational establishments and the lack of new buildings to cope with the growth and greater complexity of the demand for education have thrown into sharp relief the precarious backdrop against which education is unfolding.

15. One factor that aggravates the seriousness of this deterioration is the long duration of the crisis. It should be borne in mind that if the decline in teachers' pay and the failure to maintain buildings and equipment continue for a very long time, they will have irreversible consequences which will make it necessary to retrain staff completely, rebuild premises or renew all equipment, as the case may be.

16. Faced with this economic crisis, which is having such serious repercussions on education, neither families nor the State have remained idle. Families have adopted strategies of action in response to this new crisis in education. Many middle and lower middle class families, which had been able to meet the cost of their children's education privately in the past by sending them to private establishments, have chosen to send them to State schools, thus increasing the burden of demand on a sector seriously short of resources. Poor families send their children to State schools so that their children's basic nutritional needs may be met, besides, their learning needs.

17. States have faced up to this situation by maintaining levels of coverage, and in some cases have increased them. Similarly, strategies to maintain and improve certain standards of quality have been encouraged.

18. Three of the main public strategies designed to maintain educational coverage are as follows:

- (i) To give priority to population groups most at risk from the crisis and which have been passed over by the education system. This accounts for the priority given to basic education and literacy.
- (ii) To support administrative rationalization in order to improve efficiency in the management of education systems. Sharing out responsibility with a view to decentralization and fuller participation by parents and by the community in general have been the main lines of action in this regard.
- (iii) To co-ordinate health care from the vantage point of the schools and to maintain and increase food aid provided in schools, within the limits of the resources available. Governments have also endeavoured to help pupils with clothing and textbooks.

19. From the point of view of quality, some of the most common strategies are:

- (i) The use of textbooks describing situations in the pupils' daily lives, new systems of evaluation (automatic promotion) and pilot experiments in areas such as data processing, improved science

teaching and new methods of teaching reading, writing and arithmetic.

- (ii) Experiments have been carried out and innovations made in the curriculum in order to incorporate such dimensions as population education, community participation, human rights teaching, ecology and the environment, and the struggle against drugs and AIDS.
- (iii) In countries with high percentages of indigenous peoples, bilingual-intercultural syllabuses have been actively encouraged, but they continue to be geared to the indigenous peoples only and do not form part of the general curriculum.

20. International co-operation has helped in various ways to ensure that such strategies to protect educational development in the region are viable. Foreign contributions, through loans or donations, at a time of severe cutbacks in public expenditure on education, acquired great importance during the decade. In particular, those contributions provided governments with additional resources for implementing their priorities. The World Conference on Education for All made it possible to combine not only the efforts of the four agencies that convened the Conference - UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank - but also those of a significant number of other agencies and non-governmental organizations. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, special mention should be made of the Inter-American Development Bank, which provided very substantial backing during the preparatory stages.

21. The last ten years have been regarded as a decade spent safeguarding educational development and, at the same time, opening up fresh possibilities: fresh in the sense of both emergent trends and the objective conditions that make new operations possible.

22. To recognize the existence of these fresh possibilities is not to deny that the crisis will continue to be a significant limiting factor. Foreign debt servicing and low economic growth rates, for example, will continue to influence public spending on education. Education policies and strategies will continue to operate under conditions of great financial austerity. But, by the same token, it may be acknowledged that energies and proposals will not be concentrated exclusively on clamoring for greater resource availability.

The lesson learned from the experience of recent years is that financial resources are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for attaining educational goals, and that even in situations of great scarcity of resources it is possible to implement successful low-cost strategies.

23. Some of the factors that, in the regional context, may have a favourable influence on educational development are the following:

- (i) From the economic point of view, according to ECLAC documents, the urgent need to correct the imbalance of the region's international position has been fully confirmed, and awareness has also grown of the importance of maintaining short-term macro-economic balances and supplementing them with sectoral policies for change. Efforts were redoubled to take greater advantage of potential for regional integration, and spurious dilemmas over industry versus agriculture, the domestic versus the foreign market, State versus private sector and planned versus market economy were largely resolved.

The proposal to 'change the patterns of production on equitable terms' recommended by ECLAC lays emphasis on the objectives of

international competitiveness and equity in a context of democratic, pluralistic and participatory institutions. A strategy based on these principles will lead to new and important demands being made on education, as it will be necessary to develop human capacities in both quantity and quality as never before.

- (ii) The consolidation of democratic governments not only creates better conditions for the operation of pluralistic patterns of participation and coexistence but at the same time makes heavy demands on the education system. These are demands for the renewal of formulae and strategies for preparing individual citizens for life in more complex societies, where needs arise from the traditional areas of civic participation and also from newer areas such as care of the environment, prevention of diseases such as AIDS, the struggle against drug addiction and new forms of social or racial discrimination.
- (iii) Trends towards regional integration have gained new strength. This is happening in an international climate that is conflict-free and, at the domestic level in particular, one of growing awareness of the need to achieve peaceful and negotiated solutions for the development of national economies. That being the case, new types of demands for cultural and educational integration will arise, at both the base of the system and in the upper echelons.

24. Economic and political changes have been accompanied by a number of educational changes, the fruit of the experience that the countries of the region have gained. Such changes include the following:

- (i) In the context of national reform, proposals to decentralize the administration and management of education systems have become widespread. Although experience and results vary significantly and it is too early to draw conclusions, it is obvious that decentralization is a framework with a high potential for encouraging the participation of new actors, curriculum adaptation, accountability for educational results and administrative efficiency.
- (ii) Moves towards decentralization have also made it possible to recast the role of the State in both central and local administration. At the central level, States have started to strengthen their capacities to evaluate results and to draw up and implement programmes with a view to evening out differences. At the local level, it is easier to devise opportunities for linking the work of the school to that of other institutions concerned with education and other members of the community.
- (iii) Growing awareness of the value of education in development strategies has given impetus to processes which, although still in their infancy, make it possible to identify aspects on which some of the changes will be concentrated in the immediate future. Such changes may centre on strengthening and modernizing the teaching of reading, writing and science, on the more systematic use of information technologies both in teaching and in the management of education systems, on the need to make school establishments receptive to the world of work and to culture, on recognition of cultural diversity as a factor that gives added breadth to educational schemes and on the promotion of educational innovations and steps to improve educational quality as one of the central themes running through action-oriented strategies.

25. The end of the decade marks, to a certain extent, the end of a process of educational development in which the region scored important quantitative successes but at the cost of low levels of efficiency, quality and equity. Quantitative achievements have been maintained during the decade thanks primarily to the efforts of families and teachers. In such circumstances, however, quantitative gains cannot be sustained for much longer and development demands in terms of equitable change in production patterns will call for more and more attention to be paid to improving the quality of academic achievements. In short, the countries of the region are faced with the challenge of devising strategies to meet new demands in the field of education brought about by social change. Taking up this challenge implies putting the medium- and long-term dimension on the decision-making agenda of education authorities. From this point of view, one of the most important lessons to be learned from the decade of crisis is that the pressing need to take long-term decisions must be recognized. These decisions imply:

- (i) The link-up between the State and the private or non-governmental sector. The question must then be raised: how can equality of opportunity be guaranteed in an education system in which the private sector has a growing share of responsibility for education?
- (ii) With regard to gearing education to the world of work, scientific, technological and cultural output, the question should be raised: how can the education system break out of its isolation from the productive, scientific and cultural dynamism of modern society?
- (iii) With regard to co-ordination between central and local government, it would be useful to ponder the questions: what should be the role of each? What machinery is most effective in achieving unity amid diversity?
- (iv) With regard to the stability of educational funding policies, it would be worth while to ask questions such as: how can a steady flow of resources for the implementation of long-term education policies be ensured? What machinery is most effective in eliminating discrepancies? And which incentives are likely to enlist greater private participation in the funding of education?
- (v) On the subject of the growing professionalization of teachers as a body, certain questions should be asked, such as: what initial and in-service training strategies should be promoted? How can creativity, innovation and greater accountability for results be encouraged? How can the most talented people be attracted into the teaching profession?

CHAPTER II: A MINIMUM OF EIGHT TO TEN YEARS' SCHOOLING FOR ALL CHILDREN OF SCHOOL AGE

26. As the decade comes to an end, it is important to point out that in spite of great financial constraints, the number of pupils enrolled in basic education has risen. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that repetition has also increased.

27. Some 30 per cent of pupils entering the first year do not get beyond the fourth grade of primary education; approximately 50 per cent drop out of the school system before completing primary education, which lasts for six, seven or eight years, as the case may be.

The high percentage of academic failure in the poorest population groups brings out the existence of serious problems of equality of access to and retention within the school system. This is proof that problems of coverage and quality cannot be considered in isolation. The reliable records available confirm that one of the most important challenges to be taken up in the next two decades, in view of the level of educational development attained in the region, will be to expand and consolidate levels of coverage by making significant improvements in quality and in conditions of equity in the field of education.

Pre-school education

28. The expansion of the coverage of pre-school education marks one of the decade's major steps forward. The information available indicates that about two thirds of 5-year olds and a quarter of 3 to 4-year olds are covered. The English-speaking Caribbean countries have made great strides at this level and most of them have introduced compulsory schooling for 5-year olds. In spite of this progress, coverage is still concentrated in urban areas except in a few countries where the public sector has made major efforts to extend coverage to rural children. Similarly, in terms of both the coverage and the quality of the education available, the middle and upper classes have the advantage. The private sector caters for a quarter of pre-school enrolments, and concentrates its supply in the economically more privileged urban areas. In rural areas, however, this responsibility rests primarily with the public sector.

29. Financial difficulties and constraints have boosted inventiveness in finding pre-school educational alternatives that both serve educational purposes and comply with demands that comprehensive arrangements be made for children living in conditions of poverty. Strategies of community action, involvement of fathers and mothers as educators of their children and training of instructors from within the community itself have made this a very vibrant level of education displaying much internal variety.

30. That variety also has to do with the variations in the ages of children in pre-school education. There are three distinct age-groups, matched by different strategies of action: the 4 to 6 age-group, the 2 to 4 age-group and the 0 to 2 age-group.

31. In the 0 to 2 age-group, action is geared to educating families, and especially mothers, to provide early stimulation, health care and proper nutrition for their children. The demand for this type of action is met by the ministries of health, with very little input from the ministries of education. Non-governmental initiatives concentrating on areas of extreme poverty play a very important part in its development. The contribution of the churches and of charities in conjunction with UNICEF's very substantial contribution have

been crucial to the development of this type of activity. Programmes are being carried out in many countries through the mass media, which have an important educational role to play.

32. A vital theme in any discussion of education policies is that of ways and means of providing support for the initial education of children up to the age of 2 in population groups that take priority under the Major Project in the Field of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean. Adult education is still required for both mothers and fathers, and for persons working with the children and their families. The content of functional literacy programmes in the countries of the region is geared to meeting that demand. In the context of vocational training, there is a heavy demand for adult education that must be met.

33. For the 2 to 4 age-group, it is apparent that the form of education provided varies according to social class. In the middle and upper classes of society, its growth parallels the growth in education for 4 to 6-year olds. In poor rural and urban fringe areas, there is a high level of community participation. Important experiments are under way in some countries of the region such as the day-care centres programme in Colombia and the informal initial education programme operating with community participation in Mexico.

34. This demand remains largely unsatisfied, owing to budgetary constraints. With the growth of awareness of its importance and of the need for women to work, demand has every reason to increase. The extent of organization in the community is a crucial factor if the latter is to achieve self-sustaining development, which calls for efficient, intersectoral working arrangements to be devised.

35. One subject for discussion is whether priority should be given to developing this level or, on the contrary, concentrating efforts on the pre-primary education of children aged 4 to 6. Enlisting the help of community agents in the care of children aged 2 to 4 has been a step towards achieving all-round provision for children and, equally important, education and entry into the world of work for adults, especially women. Adult literacy and education in this regard raise a very important issue: how to satisfy the demand for adult education in such a way as to give direct encouragement to improving the quality of education for children up to the age of four.

36. As already mentioned, there has been considerable expansion in the provision for 4 to 6-year olds. Future debates will centre on how to link this level of education to primary education. The main points at issue have administrative and financial, as well as educational, aspects.

37. In that regard, answers must be sought to questions such as: in the present circumstances of austerity, is it possible and desirable to propose as an objective one or two years of compulsory pre-school education? What are the most appropriate ways and means of linkage? Is it possible to promote just one level of education which will cover the years of pre-school education and the first few years of basic education, and will concentrate on meeting the basic needs of learning to read, write and do arithmetic, and the all-round development of the child's personality? Will teachers at this level require specialized training or can primary-school teachers be used without professional retraining?

Primary education

38. At the regional level, the countries' efforts to expand educational coverage have yielded growth in both gross and net rates of primary-school enrolment. Although population patterns differ from one country of the region to another, these increases indicate that all in all the growth of education has exceeded population growth. The most recent estimates available for the 1990s show that the number of pupils enrolled between the ages of 6 and 10 has risen from 64.8 to 71.4 million. This increase seems to be the combined effect of three factors, namely, the expansion of pre-primary education (which has risen from 7.9 to 15 per cent in ten years), easier access to basic education (the net enrolment rate rose from 80.2 per cent to 85 per cent for 6 to 11-year olds, and for 8- and 9-year olds the net rate is over 90 per cent), and longer time spent attending school as regular pupils (five years or more). In the aggregate, these increases have been achieved concomitantly with a fall from 29 to 27 pupils per teacher during the decade.

39. Analysis of the official information available on enrolments suggests that, allowing for exceptions, all children who so desire may have access to schooling. As a result, at present, constraints on the general provision of basic education have to do not so much with factors relating to the expansion of the system but rather with factors relating to the quality of education. These factors are, on the one hand, the diversity of demand, which is both multiple in origin and manifold in social and economic motivations and requirements, especially in societies where there is bilingualism and geographical dispersal of the rural population and, on the other, a series of determining factors that have led to a decline in the quality of State education. On the whole, these factors are concentrated in four critical areas: late enrolment, repetition, temporary drop-out and premature final drop-out. The first three are interactive and reinforce premature drop-out. Permanent drop-out occurs between the ages of 10 and 12, and more than 55 per cent of 15-year old pupils drop out once and for all.

40. There are certain obstacles connected with demand which, because of their persistence, are considered to be structural and consequently call for intersectoral and integrated policies on the part of the State. They include inter alia poverty, whereby socio-economic background strongly affects academic performance, or those learning situations in which the cultural context, usually an indigenous one, is worlds apart from the context implicit in subjects taught at school.

41. Other obstacles, in particular those resulting from the downturn in public expenditure per capita on education (from US \$88 in 1980 to US \$60 in 1986) take on special importance if they are considered over time. In the short term, the unsatisfactory situation of teachers' pay has resulted in the spread of strikes, a rise in absenteeism, shorter working hours and lack of motivation to follow through innovations.

42. In the long term, the persistence of austerity and of budgets earmarked primarily for salaries makes a teaching career less attractive and cuts down to a minimum the investments that affect the quality of the education provided. This situation manifests itself in a number of shortcomings such as growing deficiencies in the state of school buildings, which are in poor condition because they are used for many purposes and by many shifts, the high percentage of incomplete and unstreamed schools, the shortage of textbooks and equipment, and the lack of resources for necessary changes in curriculum content, modernization of the system and training facilities.

43. In short, an appraisal of action aimed at attaining the objective of providing eight to ten years' education for all the children in the region shows that the obstacles to be overcome are closely bound up with the ways in which the system responds to the diversity, both cultural and material, of demand. One salient problem concerns forms of educational management in which there is on the whole very little accountability for results. High repetition and drop-out rates and low levels of learning attainment do not usually call forth appropriate reactions where educational administration is concerned.

44. The participants may be interested in discussing future strategies in primary education. The debate might focus on questions such as:

Is it desirable and possible to extend compulsory schooling to the age of 16, as some developed countries have already done, or is it preferable to ensure that eight years of schooling are effectively provided everywhere? Should basic education be seen as an end in itself providing content and activities that enable pupils to meet their needs and requirements as members of a society? In countries with poor educational coverage, would it not be advisable to reduce the number of years of compulsory schooling in order to concentrate resources and curriculum structures on a period of schooling that would be truly universal?

What are the most suitable strategies for reducing repetition in schools? How can experiments such as automatic promotion, full-time schools and one-teacher schools be evaluated?

Special education

45. Catering for the demand for special education is one factor that must be taken into account in coverage policies in order to attain the target of education for all. Although no precise information is available on the size of this demand or its location, estimates from the World Health Organization indicate that about 10 per cent of children of school age would need special attention.

46. Great progress has been made in the region in caring for disabled children attending public or private educational establishments. In addition, there has been further legislation on disabled people's right to education and their access to it. That legislation has given a boost to special education in several countries; thus making it easier to win support and funding. Similarly, in both official speeches and educational practice, there has been a gradual shift of focus, in that responsibility for caring for pupils with special needs has been transferred from special schools to the ordinary school system, which is expected to cope with the needs of all children. This educational integration marks an important step forward in the process of integrating the disabled into society in general.

47. In several countries, associations of parents of disabled children have been strengthened. Such associations are a force to be reckoned with, both in making direct contributions and in their ability to exert pressure for better facilities for disabled children and for their future integration in the labour force.

48. It should be pointed out, however, that such progress is still on a very small scale. Special education is given too little priority in resource allocation and little or no follow-up to schooling or vocational training services are provided for the disabled.

49. Some groups of disabled people still have no access at all to education, especially those suffering from serious or multiple handicaps. It is also very likely that many more disabled children do not in fact attend school because the law is not strictly enforced, or because of the lack of resources and educational services.

50. Although much has been said about the importance of parent participation, parents continue to play a minor role in the education of disabled children. The spread of knowledge and the pooling of experience, which have yielded encouraging results in various countries, have also been modest at regional level.

51. On the whole, the special education provided in the private sector tends to be qualitatively better than in the public sector, and is concentrated in urban areas.

52. Although there are major differences between countries, it can be claimed that, apart from the common problem of scarce financial resources, there is a lack of clear policies and precise strategies on education for disabled children. Legal and administrative provisions are rigid, especially with regard to the classification of handicaps and the allocation of resources by category. In addition, such definitions often fail to match individual needs. The real scale of the problem of handicap is unknown, both quantitatively (number of children with handicaps and their location) and qualitatively (nature of their educational requirements). These factors considerably hamper the planning and evaluation of the services provided and are also compounded by a certain conceptual ambiguity in determining which children actually have special educational needs. In some countries, special education is still regarded as charitable work, as a social welfare programme or as the responsibility of voluntary organizations. The attitudes of teaching staff towards the current trend of bringing disabled children into ordinary schools are coloured by strong reservations and doubts, owing to the novelty of the issue, unwillingness to change and lack of training or qualifications for coping with these new tasks.

53. In the context of the current debate on finding places for disabled children in ordinary schools, discussion arises as to whether priority should be given to expanding a subsystem of specialized services outside the ordinary education system (cf. traditional special schools) or to strategies that combine both components.

Problems also arise as to the definition of the teacher profiles: in other words, whether they should be specialists or general practitioners, trained to work in a separate or an integrated context, or whether ordinary teachers should be trained to work with special children?

In the event that the option of integrated education is chosen, it would be appropriate to ask: what are the most suitable modalities for the region? What steps are needed to ensure that expansion does not mean a decline in quality?

CHAPTER III: ERADICATION OF ILLITERACY AND EXPANSION OF EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES FOR ADULTS

54. In the closing years of the decade, national or local literacy campaigns or programmes were under way in almost all the countries of the region - a sign of the priority given to youth and adult literacy education. There has consequently been a decline in absolute illiteracy ratios and a reduction in the number of illiterates.

55. As a result of the progress made in fighting illiteracy, the problem is now concentrated in six countries of the region, although serious literacy problems persist in the indigenous population of a further four countries and in the over-40 age-group in almost all countries of the region. The number of absolute illiterates in Latin America and the Caribbean, estimated at 44.3 million in 1980, had been reduced to 42.8 million by 1987; during that period, literacy efforts were successfully stepped up so as to cater for the full population increase of approximately 100 million. The estimates of total numbers of illiterates for 1980 and 1987 are comparable, since they are based on projections derived from population census data based on standard demographic methodology. According to national estimates, which are even more optimistic, a further 4.9 million persons have been made literate through literacy campaigns or basic adult education.

56. Notwithstanding all this progress, if we assume that current trends continue until the year 2000, the total number of illiterates can be reduced to only 39.3 million, which is equivalent to 11.1 per cent of the population aged 15 and over. This estimate suggests that the region must redouble its efforts if absolute illiteracy is to be brought down to less than 10 per cent by the end of the century. For that purpose, special schemes would have to be planned to reduce illiteracy in Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras, which would otherwise have absolute illiteracy ratios approaching or exceeding 15 per cent by the end of the century. Special projects are also warranted for the indigenous communities of Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, which still have high illiteracy ratios, particularly among indigenous girls and women. Such projects would focus on enrolment of the rural population and the provision of literacy facilities for adults. Moreover, they could be made more effective if more detailed information were available on groups that have slipped through the net of enrolment and literacy efforts.

57. Evaluation studies of national experiments in literacy teaching have revealed a change of approach to illiteracy, literacy programmes and adult education. There is more awareness of the fact that illiteracy is a phenomenon associated with poverty, lack of co-ordination among multicultural social systems and the failure of the formal system of basic schooling. As a result, more realistic approaches are being adopted, taking into account the real and complex scale of the problem and the influence of the prevailing socio-economic context. Moreover, the traditional importance of literacy education is beginning to be overshadowed by the need to establish integrated adult education systems. Although adult education still consists of a scattered array of services, with little co-ordination between formal and non-formal and governmental and non-governmental programmes, there is greater awareness of the need to rise to the challenge of setting up an integrated system that will meet the needs of both new production patterns and social justice, organized around a new blueprint for basic education.

58. Progress in the eradication of absolute illiteracy is making it possible to concentrate energy and resources on the problem of functional illiteracy, which has grave implications both for the present and for the future. Functional illiteracy is difficult to measure accurately, but a rough idea of

the scale of the problem can be obtained from data on incomplete primary schooling. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where quality assessment systems and evidence of repetition and drop-out indicate that inadequacies are concentrated in the area of reading and writing, this indicator is more reliable than in other contexts. Thus, the 1980 population census data indicated that almost 60 per cent of the population over the age of 15 had not completed primary school. Even for the youngest age-group (15 to 19), the percentage was as high as 50 per cent. The situation is therefore extremely serious and will call for resolute action in the short term.

59. It has further been acknowledged that responsibility for literacy and adult education should not lie exclusively with the administrative units in ministries of education or with organizations set up for such purposes, but should devolve on the entire education system, which should be widely co-ordinated with social organizations. The proclamation by the United Nations and UNESCO of 1990 as International Literacy Year (ILY) prompted countries to give literacy education the status of a national undertaking. National committees or organizations for ILY were set up in most countries of the region and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) created special programmes or committees for the same purpose.

60. Adult education also received a strong boost from the preparations for and the results of the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, from 5 to 9 March 1990, which helped to spread the idea that the overriding aim of such activities is not just to teach people literacy and numeracy but to offer them basic education opportunities coupled with an improvement in the quality of life and greater justice and participation in the life of society for the entire population.

61. In the interim since PROMEDLAC III, there have been some outstanding examples of national action with a potential regional impact. The 'Monseñor Leonidas Proaño' National Literacy Campaign in Ecuador, which has a number of important features and implications, mobilized some 60,000 young students, made 153,000 persons literate, produced an educational impact through leaflets designed to foster awareness of the situation in the country and laid the foundations for the organization of an integrated and interdisciplinary educational programme, taking into account the recommendations of the Conference in Thailand. The award of UNESCO's Nadezhda K. Krupskaya Prize to JAMAL (Jamaican Movement for the Advancement of Literacy) in 1989 was an accolade for the multisectoral approach adopted in its programmes and for its methods and action to promote literacy among reluctant adults by means of television and special library facilities. In the field of adult education, special mention should also be made of the intersectoral and inter-agency action carried out under the leadership of the Colombian Ministry of Education by public (national and departmental) bodies, NGOs and universities belonging to the Regional Network for the Training of Personnel and Specific Support for Literacy and Adult Education Programmes (REDALF) of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a view to organizing a national adult education subsystem.

62. The gradual institutionalization of bilingual education in countries with a large indigenous population has led to an increase in programmes adopting such an approach. Outstanding examples are the creation of an indigenous education subsystem in Ecuador with literacy and adult education programmes in which the indigenous people themselves are the chief decision-makers and the main protagonists, and the progress made with the Guaraní community in Bolivia, the Papiamentu-speaking community in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao and the Creole-speaking community in certain Caribbean countries.

63. Attempts have been made to co-ordinate literacy and adult education efforts with one another and with formal basic education. A series of

strategies have been adopted with this end in view, such as the provision of combined basic education facilities for children and adults in El Salvador; the co-ordination of literacy and basic adult education, with provision for equivalent curriculum content, in Ecuador, Peru and some Central American countries; the inclusion of work components in basic adult education programmes in Argentina and Venezuela; and the organization in Ecuador of adult basic education programmes that are complementary or alternative to adult primary education and oriented towards the world of work, with craft training components and vocational training.

64. The diversification of the supply of basic adult education (BAE) is evident not only in bilingual literacy education but also in the increased use of distance education facilities and the mass media, especially in literacy work. Worthy of special mention are: literacy teaching by the Radio of the Archbishopric of San Salvador, El Salvador; programmes that use videos in literacy and post-literacy work with rural communities in Peru; and the Shuar radio system (Ecuador), which broadcasts mother-tongue literacy and basic education programmes.

65. The pilot literacy and civic education projects being carried out on behalf of rural women in the Andean subregion also deserve a mention. The systematic implementation of projects such as these has set the stage for a regional debate on the linkage of literacy and civic education with a view to safeguarding the underlying legal concepts to be found in traditional communities.

66. Most of the countries that have conducted evaluation surveys of their literacy programmes are not satisfied with the results. The competent authorities are aware of the fact that only limited progress has been made towards reaching the targets set, and they admit that the quality of the programmes may sometimes be at fault. The problem of relapse into illiteracy is extremely frequently mentioned in this connection, the main reasons for relapse being contextual factors that come into play during and after the process of acquisition of literacy skills, such as the lack of publicly accessible places where written material is available and the non-existence of post-literacy programmes that systematically follow up the learning process.

67. Adult education is one of the most vulnerable branches of activity in terms of the socio-economic context. There is a direct connection in adult education between increasing the supply and broadening its aims, while at the same time democratizing the social system. However, some changes of government, also lead to breakdowns in its organizational structures, with a correspondingly adverse impact on the quality of teaching.

68. The obstacles to literacy and adult education fall into at least five different categories, one of which is persistent failure in formal basic education. Another is the heavy potential demand for educational opportunities on the part of absolute and functional illiterates who have no access to literacy programmes. A third concerns the problems of programme quality, in particular a failure to allow for the cultural, linguistic and gender-related characteristics of the target communities, shortage of resources, inadequately trained personnel and the lack of back-up research and evaluation activities. It is also important to mention the limitations imposed by a socio-political and cultural context that is unfavourable to certain educational initiatives, owing to the negligible provision made by certain countries for systematic action to maintain and continue the adult learning process. Lastly, attention should be drawn to the problems that learners have in gaining access to programmes and staying with them, owing to unemployment, work-related demands and other problems associated with the marginal status of such adults.

69. The objectives set for the programmes are not based on a careful analysis of the situation or on consultation of the adults concerned. Programmes with exclusively educational aims predominate over other activities that are closely bound up with work, health, housing, etc. In basic education most countries provide only primary-level instruction without vocational guidance. In literacy education, programmes based on the principles of functional education predominate. Only a third of the programmes evaluated link their objectives to those of popular education.

70. In most countries, funds for literacy and adult education are very meagre and come mainly from public sources. The problem is more acute in the case of literacy instruction, especially since staff costs absorb almost all available funds.

71. A large proportion of the programmes fail to make full provision for the intercultural dimension of education. Educational content usually fails to take local culture into account and the official language is used even when it differs from the mother tongue. Mother-tongue literacy instruction is still an unsolved problem, owing to the difficulties presented by languages or dialects whose grammars are just starting to be codified and the mistrust of the indigenous peoples themselves, who are more interested in having immediate and direct access to the official language, viewed as a 'passport' to higher levels of education, standards of living and social prestige.

72. The status of teachers, and in particular their unstable employment situation and poor academic credentials, are very serious obstacles to literacy and adult education. Teachers in a number of countries are voluntary or dependent on bonuses and do not form part of the regular teaching staff. This trend is more pronounced in the case of literacy instruction. Furthermore, academic qualifications vary considerably from country to country, but the lack of specialization in adult education is a feature common to all.

73. Most adult basic education students are young drop-outs from formal day schooling with unskilled jobs. Neither the teachers nor the educational content of basic adult education curricula are geared to the circumstances and needs of these young people.

74. The debate on literacy and adult education shows signs of reaching saturation point, owing to the continuing divergence between theory and its practical application through specific programmes. In other cases, determination and activism, which are always warranted by the urgency of the cause, are not supported by analysis, research and evaluation of results.

75. A major challenge in adult education is how to design and operate national subsystems that comprise literacy programmes and basic education and training facilities, making co-ordinated use of both public and private resources and pursuing strategies designed to meet the principal, most fundamental learning needs of young people and adults. Any national adult education project depends for its success on having more effective means of organizing and mobilizing people than the conventional methods. The challenge here is that of overcoming isolation and working in conjunction with the many social actors involved in the field, chiefly business firms, trade unions, community organizations, voluntary associations and social organizations. In opting for reformed basic education for young people and adults, it is essential to seek curricular alternatives that take account of local culture and cater for the aspirations and needs of young and adult participants.

The challenge, where both absolute and functional illiteracy are concerned, is to devise and implement national strategies that mobilize all available resources for action geared to the characteristics of the target communities, with strong emphasis on everything relating to the areas of impact of the programmes. It is of vital importance that these strategies should link literacy instruction for young people and adults with action to prevent academic failure in basic schools and should give priority to those young illiterates whose educational needs are greatest and who are potentially the most strongly motivated to acquire literacy skills.

CHAPTER IV: IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS

76. In most countries of the region faced with the shortage of resources, it is the quality of education that has come under pressure. Accordingly it is in that area that we find the most serious shortfalls in achieving the objectives of the Major Project. Two consequences sum up the impact of the shortage of resources on this aspect of basic education: the overall decline in standards, and the gradual decline in the quality of particular branches of the education system.

77. This gradual decline is the result of a widening gap between the public sector's capacity to meet educational demand and that of the private sector and schools located in specific areas. The results produced by quality assessment systems in the countries where such systems exist point to differences of 50 per cent or more in the performance levels achieved by children attending different types of school.

78. In all the countries of the region, the problem of educational standards has become a central issue in policies and strategies of action. In the recent past, the countries have not attempted system-wide reforms, but most of them have fostered the development of programmes and innovations intended to improve the quality of education.

79. Analyses of factors that determine the quality of means and ends in education usually highlight such aspects as: educational personnel; pupils; curricula in terms of objectives, content and methods; teaching materials and resources; the organization of schools; the evaluation and development of teaching skills. The assumption on which such analyses are based is that the children attend schools which meet the minimum conditions that will enable them to benefit from the education on offer. Below that minimum level, both situation and strategies show a qualitative change. Nevertheless, there are some, albeit isolated, cases in which encouraging results have been achieved over the years. A case in point is the Escuela Nueva in Colombia.

A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT: ESCUELA NUEVA (COLOMBIA)

80. As soon as we set foot in a school on the Escuela Nueva model (Colombia), we see that it works in a different way. Several pupils, come up to the visitors and ask them very calmly and with great interest 'what they have come to see'; meanwhile others continue working, engrossed in their tasks. The teacher gives some final instructions to the group with which he is working and is then able to talk to the visitors. All the pupils appear to know exactly what they have to do, and if the visitors ask can tell them what they are doing and, more importantly, how they are learning. They know that they are using a method: they observe, think and write, first alone and then in groups; they compare notes for purposes of self-assessment, make corrections and rewrite, eventually asking for the comments and additional suggestions of the teacher, to whom they may turn at any time when they are in difficulty. In the Escuela Nueva, the teacher actually performs the role always recommended in colleges of education and teacher-training institutions but never put into practice, namely, the role of the guide who facilitates the learning process for the learner, i.e. the pupil.

81. There is general agreement on the central role of educators in elucidating educational processes and results. The need has thus arisen to review the role assigned to teachers in educational processes and their responsibility for results.

82. To uphold the need to review the role of teachers is to imply that the problem resides in the institutional underpinnings of the education system and not only in the shortcomings of teacher training. In most countries it can justifiably be claimed that the role assigned to teachers has minimized their responsibility for results, limiting their function to that of mere managers of methods and techniques, relaying ready-made knowledge without any need to understand how their pupils learn.

83. The best long-term strategy for giving teachers greater autonomy in decision-making and greater responsibility for results is to confer higher professional status on their work.

84. A broad debate has been initiated in this context, providing an opportunity to review the factors which assist or hinder the professionalization of the teaching role. This analytical approach, which has found expression more particularly in training centres for education personnel, may be summed up in the following question.

How far are the conditions being created that will enable teachers to assume effective responsibility for the learning achievements of their pupils, thereby producing teaching-learning processes of high quality? A question of this type should be seen in relation to such problems as aptitude of teachers, standards imposed in schools and conditions of work and employment in the teaching sector.

85. There is general agreement that the aptitude of teachers is directly related to the quality of training centres and opportunities for further training to which they have access during their working life. This is not to discount the claim that their aptitude also depends on many individual and social factors.

86. Criticism of current systems of training generally focuses on their disregard for problems arising in the classroom, the transmission of knowledge which has no practical application and the piling up of knowledge without any interdisciplinary grasp of educational processes. Criticism also points to the fact that teacher training perpetuates the faults to be found in school teaching, which means that teachers are unable to improve their work when they enter the system or to show any interest in so doing. The relative inadequacy of teacher trainers and training techniques are further justifications for the claim that teacher-training centres are going through a crisis.

87. Recent regional technical meetings on the problem of teacher training have noted that a debate is taking place in most countries on how to improve the quality of training. Many training centres are being restructured and are trying out large numbers of innovations. The debate seems to focus as much on the level at which training should be acquired as on the methods that should be used. Some countries are in favour of maintaining teacher training at secondary level, while others wish both to maintain it and to increase the number of years of study. A third group have decided to upgrade teacher training to the level of tertiary and university education. There is a wide range of alternatives in the region that can be regarded as a store of experience on which to draw so as to ensure that decisions closely match the features and requirements of each country. One phenomenon registered in most countries is the knock-on effect of the deteriorating social, economic and academic status of teachers on the selection of recruits for careers in teaching. The high percentage of drop-outs during training and among graduates of teacher-training courses for work in education confirms the belief that

many people who fail to embark on another career carrying greater status or social prestige fall back on teaching as second best.

88. The number of teachers which each country should train is also the subject of debate. Some countries tend to plan the number of graduations according to the needs of the system and restrict quotas. Other countries have opted for a training policy with no quota restrictions and turn out more teachers than are needed to meet the demand. But aside from the question of numbers, the overriding problem is: what policies will attract talented young people into the teaching profession?

89. The debate on basic or initial training for teachers hinges directly on the existence or non-existence of permanent large-scale systems of further training on which teachers can rely for professional support and advice during their careers. Some countries are tending to give priority to reforms in these areas while lowering their requirements for the duration of initial training. The debate on further training and vocational training, updating of knowledge and in-service training is based on analyses of the current situation regarding such courses, which are on the whole few in number, sporadic and irrelevant to the problems of practical teaching. The creation of permanent machinery for further vocational training and in-service training bringing the work of teachers into touch with daily life is for many countries in the region a task which cannot be postponed. There is a need to establish further training facilities to enable teachers to tackle the problems that they encounter in their work, thereby developing new knowledge on which to base new methods, which in turn will enable them to be more scientific in their approach to their pupils' learning problems.

90. With regard to institutional standards, which have direct consequences for the role of teachers, the debate concerns the degree of autonomy that teachers should be granted and envisages giving them more responsibility and setting up the machinery for professional support, supervision and monitoring that they need to help them in their work.

91. Teachers' conditions of work and employment are spheres in which the worst deterioration has been felt in many countries of the region. The general view is that these factors directly affect teachers' chances of improving their academic qualifications by concentrating on their professional work without having to take on other duties and their ability to be receptive to culture and innovation. Improvements in these conditions would not only produce more qualified teachers but would also reduce the number of conflicts over social conditions and increase the number of actual days of schooling for pupils. In many studies it has been shown that the overwhelming majority of teachers cannot afford to acquire the textbooks and other books needed to improve their skills. The same applies to the specialized newspapers and reviews that teachers need as background information to their work.

92. Improving teachers' terms of work and employment will mean that all action on behalf of the teaching sector must be stepped up in the countries of the region. It should also be recognized that the participation of teachers' unions has a decisive effect on the quality of education. They have indeed raised this problem and expressed their determination to work for improvements. Teachers' efforts to involve parents in the running and improvement of schools and to promote community-oriented activities should make a substantial contribution towards improving the quality of education.

93. Besides the role of teachers, the role of pupils in the learning process also needs to be reconsidered. It is generally agreed that pupils should take an active share in their own education, consciously building up their stores of learning and knowledge; that their relations with the teacher and with the

subject taught should be continuously defined in accordance with their learning opportunities and requirements; that educational processes should take account of their points of view, drawing on their earlier learning experience and taking in their interest and motivations. In some countries the pupil's role has been enhanced through individualized forms of learning and student management councils which enable them to accept a wide range of responsibilities. As well as promoting better standards of education by encouraging the active participation of students in the teaching-learning process, there is a need to provide satisfactory food, housing, clothing and transport for underprivileged pupils. Assistance to pupils is an important means of encouraging children with meagre resources to continue attending their schools in poor areas.

94. Where curricula are concerned, the countries have concentrated their greatest efforts on finding innovative solutions to the problems involved in learning to read, write and calculate, on improving science teaching and on introducing new subjects, especially at the second stage of basic education, such as management and control of natural resources, preservation and reclamation of the environment, prevention of specific diseases and drug abuse, population education, peace and respect for human rights and international co-operation and understanding. In several countries, computers are being phased in as teaching aids. A general trend is apparent in some countries of the region towards making curricula more flexible; this, in turn, should require teachers to be more independent and creative.

95. Current curriculum policies have been subjected to in-depth critical scrutiny at recent meetings in the region, which have pointed out the need to overcome certain built-in obstacles to better standards of teaching. The limitations that must be overcome as a matter of priority are the rigidity of syllabuses, their lack of relevance, a top-down approach to their application and a uniformity which makes them difficult to adapt to regional and especially to local circumstances.

96. Hence the advisability of promoting curriculum policies which create the right conditions for greater teacher participation, and some attempt to achieve greater flexibility, relevance, diversification and assessment. Recommendations have been made for the development of open-ended, flexible, diversified curricula which would combine a universal core common to the whole country with regional content of greater cultural relevance.

97. The need for flexibility and diversification is even greater in the area of method than it is in that of content. In most countries, the choice of methods tends to be placed uniformly in the hands of the teachers and institutions concerned. In curriculum planning, it is assumed that methodological considerations are only approximate guides, and head teachers are required to reconstruct and adapt them according to circumstances. There is more awareness of the difficulties involved in producing proposals that are applicable on a wide scale and bringing successful innovative experiments into general use. Here, granting the greatest possible degree of institutional autonomy, conferring professional status on teachers and making schools receptive to the needs and requirements of their surroundings are important aspects of strategies to change the curriculum. To sum up with regard to curricula, it would seem that more emphasis should be placed on bolstering the innovative capacity of teachers and educational institutions than on attempting to discover innovations which are universally applicable.

98. The preparation of textbooks for pupils' use has been a subject of discussion at many regional and national meetings. As well as recommendations for the preparation and mass reproduction of textbooks both centrally and along decentralized lines, several basic criteria have been established: with

regard to writing, there is a recommendation to include in all activities periods of free writing during which pupils must, necessarily, think for themselves. In the area of decision-making, the suggestion has been made that pupils should have the opportunity to select specific learning situations that will enable them to reach a certain objective. With regard to local adaptation it is desirable to induce pupils to identify model situations derived from their experience. Regarding community participation, it would be worth while insisting that many experiments make use of everyday facts about health, remedies, production and work, the family, food, plants, seeds, animals, handicrafts, minerals, simple plans and maps, educational games, songs, anecdotes, local history, the points of the compass, radio and television. For purposes of modular evaluation, activities should be arranged in sequence so that the desired objectives can be evaluated over short periods of one or two weeks. As regards the use of scientific method, it should be borne in mind that each activity should include observation, an oral and written description, comparison with the observations of classmates, experimentation, self-evaluation of results in relation to a model and a corresponding review of earlier stages with a view to subsequent review by the teacher. With regard to socialization, care must be taken to ensure that each activity includes both individual and group work. An important rule to be adopted is the avoidance of extra work for the teacher, by providing him or her with all the necessary instructions to enable the pupil/group to cope with the learning situation, even if the teacher considers it appropriate to introduce changes.

99. In most countries, the widespread use of computers, quite apart from its financial implications, is entering the debate and is one of the priorities for investment in the medium term. The countries must define the link between education and the media in short-term strategies, in view of the very wide access that the population has to television, radio and other mass media.

100. The teaching materials needed for science teaching have become a cause for concern in most countries of the region. The bearing of this branch of teaching on attitudes, knowledge and skills provides increased scope for teachers' initiatives to conserve and utilize existing resources in each area, involve pupils in the use of low-cost materials and the construction of experimental apparatus, and to find ways whereby teachers and learners can link the investigation of local surroundings with their teaching.

101. The organization of teachers and ancillary personnel performing other tasks in schools is part of the attempt to achieve administrative rationalization and democratization of forms of management. New patterns of organizing work in schools are being tried out in several countries through the co-ordination of duties and the development of work committees in which responsibilities within a single establishment can be given a social dimension.

102. Educational projects for individual schools are a type of innovation that is in harmony with local development processes. These projects are devised by the teachers and headteachers themselves, which facilitates the co-ordination of activities undertaken by people who usually work separately. It has been shown that the success of such projects depends directly on the leadership shown by the school head in enlisting the participation of teachers and maintaining the stability of staff within the same institution, this being an essential condition for the formation of working teams.

103. Excessive turnover of teachers and their failure to remain in the same establishment make it more difficult to introduce group work as a regular feature.

104. Teachers' workshops are a form of further training in coping with common problems that arise in the everyday business of teaching. Working in small groups, the teachers make a rigorous and systematic analysis of specific problems in order to develop, test and evaluate alternative courses of action. In various countries of the region this practice is part of the teacher's regular working day, and makes further training part of an ongoing, large-scale group activity. It has made this activity particularly effective as a form of teacher participation in the introduction of innovations to improve the quality of education with the help of continuous assessment and joint responsibility for results.

105. Several countries have managed to set up national systems of learning assessment which are designed to gauge the effectiveness of the education system both nationally and on a school-by-school basis. Some countries are trying out new learning assessment techniques which teachers might use. For example, the evaluation of modules and promotion policies are intended to reduce or eliminate possible causes of drop-out, thus helping to ensure that pupils remain in school and facilitating the return to the fold of those who have dropped out temporarily.

106. Methods of assessment are permanently on the agenda of the current debate in all countries on the quality of education. Nevertheless, in most countries, there is a need to tackle assessment in greater depth and on a more continuous basis.

107. The accumulated frustrations generated by the results of pilot innovations intended for general application tend, paradoxically, to promote the capacity for innovation rather than individual innovative experiments. As well as being an ingredient in training and further training policies, the development of an innovative capacity calls for specific policies to strengthen educational research and its links with the decision-making process. In this connection the debate on how to improve the quality of educational processes seems to focus on comprehensive policies for teachers and synergetic action drawing together the various factors that influence those processes. The systemic nature of the factors involved in educational processes would seem to indicate the need for strategies which adjust and harmonize activities relating to all branches.

108. The management of education at the institutional level may bring about progress that affects the quality of education. The build-up of administrative structures and multiple responsibilities at the centre and apex of the system of decision-making machinery for the whole education system, the legal and tax system, and the human resources management policies of government agencies in general and in education systems in particular, are some of the main factors which tend to make management rigid. The result of this trend over time has been a system whose structure and functioning hinder the development of two components which are essential if the quality of education is to be improved: firstly, definition of responsibility for the results of educational action and, secondly, development of the incentives needed in order to encourage innovations and ensure that they are universally introduced.

109. The restrictions imposed by the economic crisis and the demands of democratization have in most countries of the region fostered restructuring of the State on a grand scale and the reformulation of its role in society in general and in education in particular. The deconcentration and decentralization of the various components and forms of State management are the intended means of implementing this process. The purpose of these

experiments is to achieve a combination of skills and functions (different in each country) at central, regional and local levels. Current developments indicate that under this general heading a great many different processes have been launched in curriculum administration aimed at making educational content more relevant and also in the funding of education with a view to achieving a greater mobilization of resources. It should be noted that the implementation of these processes is itself creating new situations and generating unexpected momentum in a number of areas. Deconcentration and decentralization need permanent machinery for research, training, evaluation and follow-up.

110. Similarly, State reform entails a major shift in the roles, styles and practices of management of the system towards generating a capacity at central level to trace the broad outlines of education policy, follow-up and evaluation and to develop the machinery necessary for its function of restoring balance; and also towards giving local administrative authorities the capacity and degree of autonomy necessary to improve the education service. With these aims in view, a series of important experiments has been launched in various areas for the purpose of improving the quality of education.

111. On the basis of specific experiments in past decades, several countries in the region have decided to set up permanent information systems in order to collect and generate data enabling them to detect and assess the level of quality of educational services. Nowadays a reliable national system of quality control is not only a means of gauging how efficiently values are acquired or knowledge is transmitted, but is also seen in efficiency terms as a follow-up and monitoring system providing support for efforts to improve quality on a region-wide basis and in individual schools. By revealing quality levels the system provides information on progress and problems, raises the awareness of the community and identifies areas for action and areas of responsibility. Within general policy guidelines for improving the quality and fairness of education, emergency action has been started in one country of the region to improve the performance of 900 basic level non-fee-paying schools in poorer districts which represent the bottom 10 per cent of schools nationally in terms of educational attainments. Through a combination of activities focusing on pupils, teachers, methods and infrastructure, the programme seeks to improve the learning performance of children in the first four grades in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetic. This programme was properly implemented thanks to the unqualified political will behind it, and also because there are systems for measuring the quality of education which can identify schools whose situation is critical, and likewise a system providing information on the state of premises and materials.

112. In the area of planning it has been necessary to explore new approaches in an attempt to overcome the limitations of traditional practices. Special emphasis has been placed on trying out strategic planning models which make it possible to tackle greater levels of uncertainty and facilitate linkage with other cultural and economic contexts. In a more original vein, there is also a trend towards situational approaches which allow political variables to be taken into account in planning. Many current experiments in local and participatory planning have highlighted shortcomings and the need to reinforce and expand micro-planning and school mapping.

113. Attention is also being focused on simplifying the system from within, looking for alternative forms and rationalizing its operation. Here, one priority area has been the formulation of short- and long-term policies for training and the management of human resources. Priority has been given, then, to the development of new training techniques, the creation of innovative systems for the evaluation of new needs, new job descriptions, new systems of promotion and incentives which correspond primarily to criteria determined by

the changing context rather than criteria of seniority. Another issue of strategic importance which is beginning to emerge more clearly is the need at central, intermediate and local levels for strategies of deconcentration and decentralization which depend on a critical mass of officials capable of managing the system efficiently and of making regular innovations by introducing both modern management techniques and the new information technologies.

114. Such management capabilities are all the more necessary in that the quality of supply in the public sector is considered to be inadequate and tends to be seen as 'everybody's responsibility'. This view recognizes the emergence of a plurality of new actors whose participation must be co-ordinated with the educational work of the ministries or departments of education, and which also mirrors the trend towards intersectorality and a global approach to priority issues and problems. The mobilization of extra-sectoral resources and co-ordination with other sectors in the public domain and the private sector, as well as with private education, non-governmental and religious organizations, community bodies and parent organizations, calls for attitudes and skills which civil servants must acquire, particularly those working at decentralized levels, such as local government and school management.

115. The impact of the financial crisis has tended to be that funds earmarked for education are used essentially to pay salaries. Activities to improve quality therefore tend to be restricted, dependent on external funding or directed towards improving the efficiency of the system; in other words, achieving more with the same resources. There is growing awareness of the fact that the inefficient use of educational resources cannot continue. If the efficiency of education systems is to be improved, new forms of resources management must be sought and activities in different areas must be linked. To that end, efforts are being made to reduce the wastage entailed by high repetition and drop-out rates, to improve the management of educational facilities and to review the criteria for distributing funds among the educational levels. New terms and conditions are also being worked out for the allocation of financial resources according to pupil attendance at the various institutions, the development of new modalities of educational funding and the establishment of new forms of taxation linked to decentralization.

CHAPTER V: THE MAJOR CHALLENGES OF THE NEW STAGE
IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

116. The region will have to rise to the challenges described in the preceding chapters if it is to make progress towards achieving the goals of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, in line with the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All, whose aim is to meet basic learning needs.

117. In a context in which education has begun to play a leading role in new development models, the region faces two major challenges as it embarks on a new stage of educational development.

118. The first challenge is to arrive at major national agreements on education from which educational policies and strategies can derive legitimacy and continuity. The second is to infuse greater vitality into education systems through strategies that will bring education out of its present isolation and give those involved in the educational process greater autonomy in decision-making and greater responsibility for results.

119. The possibility of launching a new stage in educational development in the region is enhanced by the existence of a favourable socio-political context for the participation of the various social actors in strategies designed to achieve its goals and objectives. A favourable socio-political context undoubtedly depends on factors such as the existence of an explicit social and political consensus on a line of educational development that is properly co-ordinated with national development trends. Working out national agreements on education is one possible means of providing socio-political support for educational activities and thus fulfilling one of the conditions for the success of educational strategies, namely, continuity.

120. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean already have a number of basic agreements on education comparable to those relating to other fields of activity. It should be mentioned here that the great majority of countries have enshrined the right to education in their constitutions and have assigned special responsibility to the State for guaranteeing the exercise of that right. At the regional level, the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean lays down objectives and priorities for the period up to the year 2000. At the world level, the World Conference on Education for All specified goals and targets for meeting basic learning needs. The call for a national agreement on education implies reactivating existing agreements and producing new ones that are interlinked in such a way as to reflect the reinforced political will to embark on a new stage of educational development.

121. The conclusion of a national agreement implies the expression in formal terms of a political will that endorses the commitment of political and civil society to joining forces in order to meet the social demand for education. From the point of view of form, such agreements may range from the enacting of general laws to the conclusion of specific undertakings.

122. This being the case, the conclusion of a national agreement on education presupposes the launching of a debate on the most significant aspects of educational development and its co-ordination with overall development strategies.

123. Introducing procedures for the formulation of a national agreement on education is the responsibility of governments, political parties and social actors in general. Democratic government structures have appropriate channels for doing this, both at parliamentary level and in the State's relations with the various political, economic and social actors.

124. The content of the national agreements will vary from country to country; there can be neither prior limitations nor universal validity. Under these conditions, the potential for generating a basic consensus in education will depend on the circumstances of individual countries, on their ability to reconcile interests, build alliances, establish short- and long-term social commitments, co-ordinate activities and bring about social co-operation.

125. In general terms, national agreements could reinforce, inter alia, any basic consensus that high priority should be assigned to education in the allocation of resources. In this connection, world-level estimates indicate that the equivalent of two days of military spending or 2 per cent of the servicing of foreign debt would be sufficient to finance the universal introduction of basic schooling. At the regional level, the proportions seem to be much the same. A national consensus regarding the priority to be given to sustained investment in education is a necessary prerequisite for attaining the goals of new patterns of production based on social justice.

126. In addition, such basic agreements would make it possible to establish priorities for the investment of funds allocated to education. National agreement on such priorities is a prerequisite for ensuring that the activities undertaken achieve increasingly tangible results and a return on investment.

127. Furthermore, basic agreements would lead to a redefinition of the roles of the State and the private sector and of central and local authorities. Agreements on these points are necessary for co-ordinated participation by State and community bodies. They would provide for optimum use of resources and would clearly state the activities to be undertaken and the responsibilities to be assumed.

128. The basic agreements would also make it possible to focus on the need for co-ordination in educational decision-making and to devise the necessary machinery for achieving it. Agreements on consultation arrangements and the participation of different sectors in the running of educational establishments are essential in order to guarantee speed in communicating information and adjusting plans of operation.

129. The second challenge to be met in the implementation of educational strategies is that of providing the systems with stable foundations so that they can be more dynamic. In this connection, different sources of momentum may be identified as capable of adding their weight to national agreements in terms of objectives and national mobilization. They are, on the one hand, the factors that produce a direct impact on the educational process and, on the other, the machinery of regional and international co-operation.

130. It is no easy task to overcome the immobility and rigidity of education systems. Action to that end must be system-wide, although in specific situations and at specific times individual decision-makers may provide for a particular form of action that favours one aspect over others. What is important, in the final analysis, is to be aware of the different levels of action and the way in which they interconnect. Unilateral or one-dimensional approaches should be avoided.

131. Isolation, lack of continuity and organizational rigidity are obstacles directly linked to the administration and management of education systems. The purpose of administrative modernization is to make the organization of existing resources more efficient, and that of democratic management is to create conditions in which managerial personnel can work more effectively. Both the modernization and the democratization of management are criteria of action aimed at making the human factor more dynamic in education systems so that the latter may in turn exploit the potential of existing technical

resources and yield more consistent educational action designed to reconcile responsibility with autonomy and creativity with the execution of national and local education plans.

132. If educational administration and management are to play a dynamic role, it is essential to improve information systems, both for administrators and for the general public. Information has a decisive role to play in reactivating education systems inasmuch as it prepares the way for more relevant action and more discriminating demand for education. Evaluation of the performance of the education system is one means of bringing it into line with new educational demand and identifying ways of enhancing its efficiency. The establishment of permanent systems of overall and specific evaluation of results is a development aimed at breathing new life into a system that has had very little prior experience of change.

133. It is processes such as these that will ultimately determine the success or failure of efforts to attain the goals of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. They are the source of learning opportunities for students and they also have a decisive influence on the educational situations that, in the last analysis, give meaning to other factors inherent in the education system.

134. Prevailing views regarding the inertia or sluggishness of education systems in the face of the need for demand-oriented development are based for the most part on the content and form of these educational processes. There is, in turn, a broad consensus regarding the problems of poor performance, failure, repetition, drop-out and the inadequate qualifications of those graduating from the system, all of which confirm the urgent need for systematic action to modernize these processes. It is also clear that the region is not starting from scratch but has a store of experience on which it can draw. Most countries have had experience with or are at present implementing curriculum reforms in an attempt to deal with the problem. Isolated innovations have been tried, but they have not succeeded in launching a steady trend towards educational renewal in the countries concerned. The same may be said of the decentralization movement. Educational processes have probably suffered hitherto from the lack of both an internal and an external environment conducive to educational renewal. The necessary internal environment could be created through administrative rationalization and the democratization of management. A new debate to generate awareness of the importance of education for individual and social development could help to create favourable conditions in the external context.

135. The complexity of educational processes makes it necessary to work in a holistic and synergetic way through a variety of activities with a view to sustaining the momentum of renewal.

136. The renewal of educational processes as one of the pillars of an overall strategy aimed at making them more dynamic calls for co-ordinated action, geared, inter alia, to:

an integrated policy for educational personnel, with training and further training facilities designed to enhance the professional status of teachers;

more flexible and relevant curricula;

more active involvement by students in the learning process;

increased production and more effective use of the media for education and for mass communication;

more and better evaluation of students' progress in the learning process;
fuller and more technical participation on the part of teachers' organizations;
reorganization of teaching work in educational establishments;
development of teaching expertise.

137. The history of regional and international co-operation has shown that it is not only a source of funding for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean but also a factor conducive to the dynamic development of education systems. Regional co-operation has played a part in many drives by individual countries in the fields of educational legislation, reform and innovation. Countries have derived mutual benefit from exchanges of persons and experience. The wide range of regional and international co-operation that has taken place in the past has invigorated and supported national education systems, motivating individual countries to join the regional and worldwide campaign for educational development. The closing of borders, depowerment, atomization and isolation are factors that have contributed to immobility, stagnation and the hardening of resistance to change. By contrast, the opening of borders, transparency, co-ordination and joint efforts have proved to be factors conferring dignity on the action that people take and imbuing education systems with new meaning and with new individual and social energy.

138. Infusing new energy into education systems must therefore be seen as a regional and international cause, with co-operation as a prerequisite for educational development in each country.